

good poetry

I received a dozen poems in the morning mail.
12 masterpieces from a second generation immigrant,
and I didn't want to believe
that so much genuine history could come so consistently.
I tried to take a shower and dismiss it,
tried to smother the flame:
the soap --
slimy on my arms and legs,
running down my neck,
running down between the canyons of my toes,
between my legs and down the silver drain,
between Poland and a speedy train to London,
the soap made it sting --
as if I had his poetry in my eyes.
there were the images of voiceless mothers
in black trunks,
naked Italians on Ellis Island,
an army of irregulars
who would only have made it into print
the day their obituary was drafted by a novice reporter,
was it not for this trafficker in words,
as I've heard it said, who
has sent me to the showers.
good poets are Hitlers of the mind.
while towelling,
I realized that his best poems
were yet to be written.

-- John Kay

Long Beach, CA

flak

when Bob went over to Nam
I figured he was ready
for the killing
he was always talking about
killing anyway
usually it was himself
he wanted to kill
along with former teachers
former employers
& five or six old girl
friends.

an existential hoodlum
a blue eyed con man
he read Plato & Sartre

he read Camus
got into knife fights
in the street
made it with more girls
than the rest of us
dreamed of.

something was on fire
at the core of him
anyone who went near
felt that fire.

in his artillery unit he
smoked a lot of grass
watching the pretty colors
in the sky
smoked a lot of grass &
caught some flak one time
I think that's what you
call it, flak.

his right eye ruined for good
they shipped him home
with some pretty medals
he could only half see.

now we sit in the Wagon Wheel
drinking draft beer &
watching the pretty colors
of a Hamm's Beer sign.

Bob seldom talks about the war
but sometimes when he's drunk
he bitches about gooks & commies
& demonstrators
he bitches about buddhists &
dead buddies.

he talks about making something
of himself
some day.

he never looks at you
when he talks anymore.

the spittoon

my slovak grandfather had this friend
he knew him from the old country
I think
they looked a lot alike
the two friends
& they'd sit in the living room
sit stiffly in stuffed chairs
never looking relaxed
at times they hardly looked alive